For Stewards of Maryland's Backyard Wildlife

Habichat

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HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space -**IS THE KEY!** This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property.

Write to Me! Marilyn Mause, Wild Acres Program, DNR, Wildlife & Heritage Service, Gwynnbrook WMA, 3740 Gwynnbrook Ave, Owings Mills MD 21117, 410-356-0941, E-Mail: **customerservice@dnr.state.md.us**

Native Plant Profile.....Pin Oak (Quercus palustris)

Deciduous tree 70 feet- 80 feet in height.
Found in the wild on low, moist soils, but can tolerate a wide variety of conditions.
Prefers sun or partial shade.
Oaks provide important food in fall and winter for many animals.

Flowers/Fruits: Inconspicuous yellow catkins. Female flowers born singly or in clusters. Acorns produced from September to November the second fall after flowering.

Landscape Notes: Broad pyramidal crowns and attractive form make it a favorite for yards, parks and streets. A hardy, long-lived tree that grows faster than other oaks. Needs little care.

Oaks trees provide food for: the Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Turkey, Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite Quail, Ring-necked Pheasant, Mourning Dove, Common Flicker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, red-bellied, Red-headed, Hairy and Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Common Crow, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush, Eastern Meadowlark, Rusty Blackbird, Common Grackle, Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Rufous –sided Towhee.

Eastern Chipmunk, Gray Squirrel, Flying Squirrel, Fox Squirrel, Red Squirrel, rabbits, deer, black bear, opossum, muskrat and raccoon also eat Pin Oak acorns.

Oaks are cover for: Common Crow, Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak,

Oaks are nest trees for: Common Crow, American Robin, Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

Additional note: If you have room, plant oaks from both the red oak group and white oak group to insure that a steady crop of acorns are produced each year.

It Starts with the Soil – Hints from the E.P.A.

Soils can be divided into three basic classifications: Sands, Loams, and Clays. There is great variation within these basic groups, but these categories will suffice for the purpose of describing soils in which given plants will grow.

Sandy soils, referred to as light soils, contain large sized soil particles that are loose and easy to work. They allow water to drain readily, and tend to be low in nutrients. Sandy soils tend to be more acidic than the more fertile loams and clays. If your soil's pH is below 5, consider adding lime or ashes to raise the pH to 6 or 7.

Clay soils are known as heavy soils, consisting of small, tightly packed soil particles, clays tend to be dense and hard to work. They are generally rich in nutrients, have a high water-holding capacity, and can be very productive, but they don't drain well.

Loamy soils are intermediate – between sands and clays. Composed of different-sized particles, they combine fertility and moisture holding capacity with good drainage. Easier to work with than clays, better consolidated than sands, loamy soils are an excellent growing medium.

Dig into your soil when it is dry. A sandy soil will seldom exhibit clods. Any clods that do form will crumble easily. A loamy soil will have clods that can be sliced cleanly with a shovel. Clay soils tend to form hard, persistent clods. Rather than slicing through them, a shovel will get stuck or will shatter the clod into many hard, little blocks of soil.

If you have sand or clay soil and wish to improve it, add large quantities of organic matter. Compost and dead leaves are excellent. Do not use sawdust or wood chips. These require a long time to break down and rob the soil of nitrogen, avoid uncomposted manure. It contains large numbers of weed seeds.

Another method of improving poor soils is to plant a green manure crop, such as buckwheat or winter wheat. These crops improve the soil by bringing up nutrients from the lower soil and converting them into organic plant matter. The crop is plowed under while actively growing to incorporate the roots and leaves into the soil.

Soil moisture is equally important in deciding what species to plant. Moist soils have a generous amount of water in the subsoil throughout the growing season. They may have periods of standing water in the spring or fall. Dry soils include sandy and gravelly soils that drain readily and never have standing water, even after a heavy rain. Mesic (medium) soils include well-drained loams and clays. These soils may have standing water for short periods after a hard rain.

Composting: Composting vegetative waste speeds the natural process whereby organic material is returned to the soil to add fertility. Aged compost can be worked into the soil at planting time or added as surface mulch any time. Alternately layer combinations of as many of these items as you have available.

Green waste: Kitchen wastes (avoid dairy, meat, or synthetic products), grass clippings.

Brown waste: Shredded leaves. Sawdust (not from treated wood), straw, uncolored paper products.

Topsoil: it stocks your compost with the organisms needed for decomposition.

Manure: Fresh or aged, but NO pet wastes.

Keep the pile moist by watering or covering it to retain moisture. Good air circulation is necessary so the sides of the bin need to "breathe". Once the pile reaches about four feet cubed, start a new pile. Turning the pile with a pitch fork from time to time will speed the process, which will take anywhere from three to 18 months. You have humus when the material is dark and crumply, bearing no resemblance to the original components, and has a fresh earthly smell.

If you are in not sure what type of soil you have, take a soil sample to a soil lab recommended by your local extension office. They will be able to do an analysis and provide recommendations.

Backyard Wildlife Fun for Kids

During the doldrums of winter when your children or grandchildren are looking for something to do, let them make bird treats for a fun backyard wildlife project. Making bird treats is an easy project for children to do under the supervision of adults. These treats can be hung outside on any tree or shrub with sturdy branches.

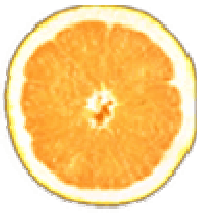
If you're ready to recycle your cranberry and popcorn garland from the Christmas tree, just drape the garland outside on branches. Other garlands can be made strung with large raisins and other chunks of dried fruits and peanuts –in-the –shell. Children love making peanut butter and jelly pine cones and orange treat cups. And for the bakers in the family, you can make cranberry hasty pudding cakes.

Peanut Butter and Jelly Pine Cones

Pine cones
String or yarn
Peanut butter
Apple or grape jelly

Tie the string or yarn to the tops of the pine cones for hanging. Divide the pine cones into two piles. Smear globs of peanut butter on pine cones on one pile. Smear jelly on the other. Hang on tree.

Orange Treat Cups



Oranges (grapefruits and/or coconuts can also be used)
Chopped nutmeats (peanuts, black walnuts, pecans, almonds, coconut)
Fresh fruit cut up, fruit cocktail or dried fruit
Black oil sunflower seeds
String or yarn

Cut oranges, grapefruits, or coconuts in half to serve as the treat cup. Scoop out insides and reserve. Poke three holes near the top for the string to serve as a hanger. Fill one cup with nutmeat mixture. Fill a second cup with fruit mixture. Fill a third with sunflower seeds. Repeat as necessary and hang.

Cranberry Hasty Pudding Cakes

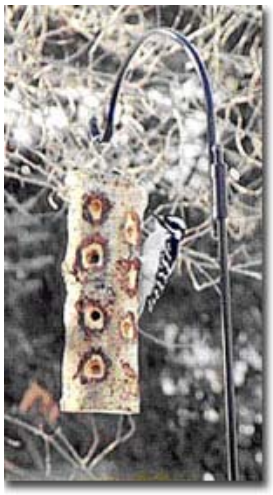
In a big pot, combine all ingredients in order listed except dog biscuits and mix well. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until thick (about 5 minutes). Remove from heat and stir in dog biscuits. Mold into cakes. Chill. Place chilled cakes in onion bags and hang from sturdy branches.

Ingredients
2-2 ½ c. chopped or ground fresh suet
½ c. sunflower or other salad oil
1c. white or brown sugar
2 c. yellow cornmeal (yellow has vitamin A)
3 c. water, more if needed
2 c. cranberries
1c. peanut hearts or nutmeats
1 ½ c. crumbled dog biscuits

HINT: Bluebirds don't often visit feeders but are more inclined during cold weather. Peanut hearts, pecan meats, suet, raisins, currents and baked apple are good foods to offer.

Homemade Suet Feeders

Reducing the amount of dietary fat is a smart choice for healthy eating, at least for humans. Birds, on the other hand, need fat in their diet, particularly in winter. Beef kidney suet, available at grocery stores and backyard wildlife centers is a rich source of fat readily eaten by at least eighty species of North American birds. Backyard birds attracted by suet are those that painstakingly glean over wintering insect pupa and eggs from bark. Some of the insects taken include those that damage trees and shrubs. Attracting these birds to your yard helps keep your shade trees healthy, contributing to the overall balance of a backyard ecosystem.



Suet can be offered raw in feeders, in ready-made cakes from stores or prepared in the following recipe:

1 cup peanut butter
2 cup melted beef suet
4 cup finely cracked corn
2 cup white or yellow corn meal

Chop raw trimmed beef suet into small pieces and place in a large heavy covered pot. Pour a ½ inch of water in with suet on medium hot stove. Cover. Uncover and reduce heat to low when a third of the suet is melted. Cook uncovered, stirring occasionally until melted. Stir in peanut butter, then remove from stove. Stir in other ingredients. Pour or ladle into muffin tins or loaf pans and chill until hard. Offer cakes in feeders or warm to soften and fill suet log feeders.

Winter birds in Maryland that eat suet and suet mixtures include woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice, wrens, jays, nuthatches, sparrows, blackbirds, and grackles.

Acknowledgements:

- Black & white illustration of woodpecker on suet feeder courtesy of Sam J. Norris, Cornell Lab of Ornithology.
- Photo of woodpecker "paper cup" feeder courtesy of Marc Behrendt, member of FeederWatch, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Note: Marc Behrendt of Somerset, Ohio, designs his own woodpecker feeders. He melts suet, mixes in some seeds, and pours the liquid mixture into waxed paper cups. In addition to woodpeckers, the feeders attract chickadees, nuthatches and titmice.
- Downy woodpecker feeding at a homemade log feeder courtesy of Marjorie Beauchaine of Waylata, MN, member of FeederWatch, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.
- Special thanks to Jennifer Smith and Anne Marie Johnson, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology for their assistance in arranging for photos and artwork for this issue of Habichat.
- Photos of Pin Oak fruit and foliage courtesy of Paul Wray, Iowa State University, www.forestryimages.org
- Photos of compost bin courtesy of USDA.
- Photo of hands holding leaf compost courtesy of USDA, photo by Larry Rana.

Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online**... Inspired by nature! www.dnr.maryland.gov

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through early April. FeederWatch helps scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation. http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Maryland's **"Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program "** - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@dnr.state.md.us.

For a free wildlife & native plant newsletter, visit the **WindStar Wildlife Institute** at www.windstar.org and subscribe to the WindStar Wildlife Garden Weekly e-newsletter. You can also visit this website to learn how you can become a certified wildlife habitat naturalist.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

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